Resource

Renewal

Institute

December 28, 1993

To: John Sumser
From: Peggy Lauer

Happy New Year.

This is in response to your memo on the roles and responsibilities of a Point Foundation Board of Trustees.

One of my goals as a board member is to converse with you by Whole Earth Lectronic Link, in part because it seems that everyone who logs on becomes prodigious and witty. My excuse for now is that I am hampered by an unlinked computer and a ponderous facsimile machine.

On Primary Function
First off, be engaged, curious, interesting, and effective.

The more specific responsibilities of a board member of a public benefit organization are to approve policy and budgets, and make sure that the organization doesn't suffer damage to its assets.

It is quite reasonable in building a board to choose individuals that will also bring in funding and other connections and complexities that will make the organization's future rosy and enriching. Some of the responsibilities you have listed, however, I would see better suited to an executive committee or an advisory board, or whatever you would choose to call it. And then there are responsibilities that are best filled by staff or professional consultants.

On Subscriptions
You are looking for signs of and real commitment from your board. But the board doesn't have the wherewithal to get and maintain 500 subscriptions every year. The board can supplement the paid efforts of a circulation director, who is responsible for bringing in new subs and turning them into regulars, and hopefully into supporting and maniacal subscribers. The board, as well as an advisory board, can be involved in fundraising events, buy subscriptions for friends and business associates, get it into his or her local library, and promote it among colleagues. This I am happy to do.

I like your notion of the board as a sounding board for ideas. I'd be pleased to help, for instance, with ideas on a redesign and relaunch of the magazine, which ties in with subscription or "membership" development, but agree that you and your staff make the decisions.

On Meetings
According to the Bylaws, which, granted, have seldom been followed, there is one board meeting a year, but the president, i.e. you, or a majority of board members can call other meetings. If you want geographic diversity on the board--as well as

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of orientation, sex, creed, culture and profession--it doesn't seem feasible to have a full board meeting every month, if "attendance" is meant in the old-fashioned face-to-face way. If there is to be a no-miss clause, you will limit yourself to people in the Bay Area, which won't help to challenge the left-coast feel of the magazine, and won't help to expand the universe of potential donors and subscribers into new regions. (Does Dr. Tom Ferguson still live in Austin?). These monthly meetings can still happen with your advisory board or committee, which should have the same kind of diversity, and include trustees if they choose.

I don't think board meetings should be any longer than two hours. If you set time limits on everything, you will avoid the kind of thing you and I got into the last meeting. You will get things done. This doesn't preclude discussion, it focuses it.

On Time Commitment
You are essentially disqualifying individuals who run organizations fulltime (spending the kind of hours you put into your full time job) if you are going to require a minimum of 10-12 hours a month. It may be that someone would spend 5 hours one week fundraising and none for a month after that, depending on what is needed. If a board member chooses to put in more time, that's great.

The board hires the Executive Director, who, in this case, also serves as the president of the board, to run the organization. If a board member puts that much time into the workings, he or she is creating a different relationship with the executive and will expect to have more of an influence in decisions best left to the executive and staff of the organization.

On Benefits to the Directors
It is fun to think of the Point Foundation close to having funds to grant to worthy fledgling ideas again, and be healthy in all the other areas. The subscription to WER and the WELL, and networking connections are fine compensation. Any kind of salary arrangement, other than your own, gets into eyebrow-raising by the state Attorney General over potential conflict of interest.

I am happy to discuss any of these points with you and the rest of the board. I look forward to the coming year. I will call in a day or two.

Sincerely,

Peggy

Peggy Lauer